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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLY - No. 48

A radio talk by W. W. Vincent, chief of the western district of the Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered July 9, 1931, over KGO, San Francisco, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations. JUN 2nd 1931

MR. LAMB: Another Thursday, folks, and W. W. Vincent, Chief of the Western District of the Department's Food and Drug Administration, is here again with his weekly talk on your food and drug supplies. Last week he talked about mushrooms, so it is rather logical that he select "chicken" for his subject today.

MR. VINCENT: Yes, suppose we do talk about poultry products but I think we had better limit our "Read-the-Label" information to canned chicken products. Recall, last December, just before Christmas, I told you something about poultry - how the Bureau of Agricultural Economics was grading the dressed turkeys then coming on Western markets for the holiday season?

MR. LAMB: That's right, you did, but you did not say anything about chickens. Why was that?

MR. VINCENT: Well, there wasn't very much for me to say. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture has not extended its grading service on dressed poultry to Western markets, so Western distributors have not been able to avail themselves of it except upon turkeys.

MR. LAMB: That's peculiar. The Eastern consumer, then, has an advantage, I take it, when it comes to buying dressed poultry.

MR. VINCENT: Yes, I am afraid so. Many birds sold as Fancy in our Western markets today would fall far short of making the United States Special or the United States Prime or No. 1 grade. I am not going to bother telling the folks about these government grades for poultry because it won't do any good. They are not available at the present time.

MR. LAMB: In addition to chickens, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics also grades dressed ducks, does it not?

MR. VINCENT: Yes. When requested, it grades ducks and all classes of poultry.

MR. LAMB: Well, how about canned duck, is there any of that produced in this country?

MR. VINCENT: Not to my knowledge. I believe most ducks go to the fresh market. Your inquiry about ducks recalls a story. It is appropriate since we are speaking of poultry.

MR. LAMB: Mr. Vincent, this is not a chicken story - by any chance?

MR. VINCENT: You're safe - this is a duck story, just an incident which illustrates some of the unusual things that come to the attention of your Food and Drug Administration. It happened about 1919, if I remember correctly. In

July, 1918, Congress passed the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and with that it became illegal to sell mud-hens.

MR. LAMB: Do you mean to say that prior to 1919 people sold for food these mud-hens or coots that we see flying around?

MR. VINCENT: Well, not exactly. One concern canned some up, however, preparatory to selling them, but not as mud-hens or coots. They packed them in a nice brown gravy and labeled them "Salmis of Duck". On the label they put a further statement to the effect that "Our products are prepared by export chefs and from fresh and sound stock; this can contains one whole duck". In each can was placed the breast of one mud-hen together with the legs; they covered the body of the bird with a dark, meaty looking gravy. Well, sir, they started to sell this canned mud-hen as "Salmis of Duck" in some of the more exclusive stores of our larger Western cities, and they shipped a little to New York. Naturally, it was but a short time after canning operations started until information reached your food and drug officials that certain "Salmis of Duck" at Monterey, California, was probably not all that it should be. The product as it stood in the cannery, while misbranded and adulterated within the meaning of the food and drugs act, was not seizable by your food authorities. It had not yet been shipped in interstate commerce. Seizure of the 431 cases, representing the cannery stock, was effected through the United States Game Warden. To sell mud-hens was violative of the "Migratory Bird Treaty Act". The product was released finally, after being relabeled as "Salmis of Mud-Hen". As "Salmis of Mud-Hen" it was exported to France. Four hundred thirty-one cases - 20,768 cans - that's the number of individuals, perhaps American families, that missed some mud-hen or canned coot at the fancy price at which canned duck would be sold. Just an illustration, folks, of the length to which some manufacturers would go were there no active enforcement of the food and drugs act.

MR. LAMB: I can well imagine what a treat canned mud-hen might be. That's an unusual one, Mr. Vincent. After that, I believe you should tell us something about our genuine canned chicken products.

MR. VINCENT: Yes, I will. It is going to be rather difficult, however. Canned chicken is growing rapidly in the consumers' favor. As with any new industry, numerous of the products first offered to the public have not been all they might have been. Today they are, however, becoming well standardized. I think of no new product presented to the American public in recent years that is being offered in so many styles. Offered to you are canned "whole chickens" and "half chickens", "boned chicken", and "potted chicken", chicken livers and chicken fat, not to mention a lot of products of which chicken is a component part. The demand has been so unusual that the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture has seen fit to extend an inspection service to chicken canning plants, and is certifying the product of those manufacturers who take the Government inspection. Such inspection imposes upon the manufacturing concerns certain sanitary requirements, approved formulae and labelings, and individual inspection of each bird used. On the products of such manufacturers as take this inspection of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics the careful label reader will find a legend, "Inspected and Certified by Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture". That is your assurance that the products are as labeled and that

the birds used were not emaciated nor diseased. Each individual bird has received the careful scrutiny of your Government agents.

In preparing "canned whole chicken" and "half chickens" some packers add a solution of gelatin or agar agar. This, after cooking and cooling, serves the purpose of solidifying the can contents, thus eliminating damage as a result of shaking. The presence of the added ingredient is stated on the label.

Products labeled "Boned Chicken", or "Boneless Chicken", or "Sliced Chicken" contain chicken meat sterilized in cans or glass jars. Generally added are some chicken fat and skin, occasionally with a small amount of salted chicken soup or broth to moisten the product. In the Government inspected plants at least 90% by weight of the contents will be found to be chicken meat. If agar agar or gelatin is added to solidify the broth upon cooling, giving the contents of the can the appearance of a solid mass upon opening, the labels will tell you so. Some packers use a light meat and some dark meat. Where the majority, or all meat used, is light meat, the labels will indicate the fact.

Another product, "Roast Chicken", packed either in a gravy or sauce, is on sale. You will observe that the label will make reference to the presence of this added sauce or gravy. In such a product, you have a right to expect a mixture of light and dark meat in the proportion normal to a whole chicken.

"Potted Chicken" and "Devilled Chicken" are made from ground pieces of chicken, usually spiced. Such a product would be misbranded and adulterated if it consisted essentially of chicken skins or contained another meat product or, again, if it consisted of but chicken gizzards and hearts. I mention that because, although the business is new, some manufacturers have already conceived the idea of selling such products as "Devilled" or "Potted Chicken".

"Chicken Sandwich Spread" is generally manufactured from a mixture of chicken meat and some broth. Skin in excess of its normal proportion will not be present. If a thickening agent, such as rice or wheat flour, is added, you will find a label declaration to that effect.

"Chicken Soup" or "Chicken Broth" are by-products made from the liquor in which the chickens prepared for canning are boiled. Usually the fat is skimmed off and sometimes an infusion, prepared by treating the bones with some of the liquid stock material, is added for flavor. If such broth or soup contains rice you will find label declaration of "added rice".

A number of specialty products are on the market. There is "Chicken a la King", "Chicken Chop Suey", "Chicken Salad", "Chicken Raviolas", not to mention "Boneless Chicken Tamales" and "Chicken Tamale Pot Pies". These products, in addition to the chicken meat content, contain varying amounts of vegetables, condiments or other food and flavoring materials and their names alone must designate the character of the product. Products of different manufacturers sold under the same name vary with their individual recipes.

You may encounter the product, "Chicken for salad". That must be chopped chicken meat without additions. But if you buy a product "Chicken for Salad with Celery", or "Condiments", you will obtain, in addition to the chicken meat, substantial amounts of celery and perhaps other flavoring materials. Wherever there is gelatin or agar agar added to any of these products, its presence must be declared upon the label.

"Chicken Giblet Sauce" is made of chicken gizzards, livers, and hearts in a product so labeled.

A product labeled "Chicken and Noodles", or "Chicken and Egg Noodles", is composed of egg noodles, an alimentary paste containing at least 5-1/2% by weight of egg yolk or egg solids in them, and chicken. "Chicken and Plain Noodles", or "Water Noodles", is perhaps not so valuable a product.

If you buy a product labeled "Chicken Liver Pate" you will find it somewhat comparable with "Pate de Foies Gras", that tasty imported product made of fat goose livers. It may contain a trifling amount of starch or flour, the presence of which the label will not declare. This is because the regulations of the Federal Meat Inspection Act provide that such products as meat loaves, pates, soup, etc., may contain cereal and similar substances without the presence of such substances being declared upon the labels. Therefore, since this "Chicken Liver Pate" is comparable to the liver pates over which the Bureau of Animal Industry has supervision, your Food and Drug Administration exempts this product from the necessity of a starch or flour declaration. Such starch where present is in but very small amount, usually less than 1%. That's all today.

MR. LAMB: Thank you Mr. Vincent. Folks, that concludes the 48th talk on Mr. Vincent's "Read-the-Label" series. If you want this information on poultry or the many other food products of which he has told you, drop a postal card to W. W. Vincent, U. S. Food and Drug Administration, San Francisco, or care of the station to which you are listening. That brings you the material free.